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SUBJECT: SERBIA EXTRADITES FUGITIVE WAR CRIMINAL
KARADZIC TO HAGUE

REF: A) BELGRADE 765, B) BELGRADE 744, C)
BELGRADE 718

Summary

11. (SBU) The Serbian government extradited Radovan Karadzic, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indictee and wartime leader of the Bosnian Serbs, to The Hague in the early morning hours of July 30. Human rights NGOs, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and other observers have called for the government to educate the public about the grounds for Karadzic's arrest and explain that the move is more than a simple fulfillment of international obligations. The Radical Party's (SRS) July 29 protest drew a modest crowd of -- at most -- 15,000 and ended in violence, despite SRS's pledges to keep the peace. Ultranationalist Obraz plans to continue the small-scale nightly protests that it has organized since Karadzic was arrested. In arresting and extraditing the notorious Karadzic, the Serbian Government has taken arguably the most dramatic political step since Milosevic was toppled. End Summary.

Karadzic Arrives in The Hague July 30

12. (SBU) The Serbian War Crimes Special Court confirmed in a July 30 public statement that Karadzic left Belgrade at 04:00 local time on July 30 and arrived at the Scheveningen detention facility in The Hague later that morning. Serbs woke up to television news footage of Karadzic landing in the Netherlands onboard a Republic of Serbia jet. The Special Court told us that, after waiting "a reasonable amount of time" to receive Karadzic's appeal (Ref A), it determined that no there was no appeal and sent the extradition order to the Justice Ministry. The Justice Ministry signed the order late on July 129. Karadzic's lawyer told the press that he had not sent the appeal in an effort to delay extradition and give Karadzic's family time to travel from Bosnia to see him (which did not happen).

Reactions to Extradition

13. (U) In interviews with B92 television, Serbia's leading human rights activists,

including Humanitarian Law Center Head Natasa Kandic, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Head Sonja Biserko, and Belgrade Center for Human Rights Director Vojin Dimitrijevic called on the government to explain the reasons for Karadzic's indictment, arrest, and extradition. They said the government was now responsible for creating the right social environment so that misinformed youth who had been calling President Tadic a traitor would not react the same way upon the arrest of Ratko Mladic, one of the two remaining ICTY indictees at large. Biljana Kovacevic Vuco of the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights made a similar point to us last week, saying the government has a responsibility to tell the full story of what happened and why Karadzic was not a hero.

14. (U) In an interview with Voice of America, Liberal Democratic Party official Natasa Misic said Karadzic's arrest and extradition were important not only because of the need to fulfill international obligations but because Serbian society needed to confront the truth about the past.

15. (U) The Serbian Radical Party (SRS), the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), and New Serbia (NS) have thus far not commented. Aside from a mid-morning press conference to present the facts, the government has been silent as well.

Hooligans Turn Violent at Radicals' Protest

BELGRADE 00000773 002 OF 003

16. (U) The July 29 rally organized by the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) drew a modest turnout of at most 15,000 mostly peaceful protestors. Participants included typical SRS supporters -- middle-aged and older men and women -- many of whom came to Belgrade by bus from the regions. They began to gather at Republic Square shortly before 19:00. There were also dozens of young people wearing paraphernalia from ultranationalist group Obraz and preparing face masks at the beginning of the rally. The rally remained peaceful until 21:45, near the end of the official program. SRS party leaders Aleksandar Vucic and Tomislav Nikolic spoke and read a message from party head and ICTY defendant Vojislav Seselj. NS leader Velimir Ilic, DSS official from North Kosovo Milan Ivanovic, and Misa Vacic of the "1389" (Note: The date of the mythologized Battle of Kosovo) nationalist youth organization also spoke. The speakers were greeted by chanting from protestors, including "uprising, uprising" and "treason."

17. (U) Despite Vucic's continued calls for calm, several hundred youth began to clash with police at 21:45. Police responded with tear gas, smoke bombs, and rubber bullets and, according to Vucic, beat him when he tried to calm down some rioters. Nikolic stopped his speech due to the violence and instead unsuccessfully urged the rioters to calm down and not embarrass Serbia. Peaceful protestors left the rally soon after the rioting began. Police cleared Republic Square in about 40 minutes, but small-scale disturbances continued elsewhere in the city. Rioters looted a McDonald's in the suburb of Novi Beograd and smashed shop windows in the center of town. Republic Square was littered with debris and broken phone booths and traffic lights and signs

in the immediate aftermath of the rally, but by opening of business on July 30, the square had been restored to normal. Twenty-one civilians, including two reporters -- one allegedly beaten by police despite his attempts to identify himself -- and 25 police were injured.

¶18. (U) Vucic told the press he believed the violence had been instigated by "infiltrators" planted by the government, which wanted to discredit the rally. Human Rights and Minorities Minister Svetozar Ciplic told press the government's reaction showed that Serbia was ready both to fight with those who would return to the past and also to move forward.

Small Protests to Continue

¶19. (SBU) Police told us that ultranationalist group Obraz plans to continue the small nightly protests on Republic Square that it began after Karadzic was arrested (Ref C). Protests are to resume on July 30 and take place every night for at least another week. In addition, on August 4 the group plans to commemorate Operation Storm, Croatia's 1995 military operation retaking the then Serb-controlled Krajina. Police said the August 4 protest would end with a march to the Croatian Embassy, which is located one block from the U.S. Embassy.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) As MFA political director Borko Stefanovic reminded us immediately after Karadzic's arrest, former Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic used to say "If you have to swallow a lot of frogs, swallow the biggest one first." The Serbian government has clearly swallowed an enormous "frog" by arresting and extraditing Karadzic. We expect that the relatively low turnout for the SRS rally will sap the Radicals' and ultranationalists' energy in opposing Hague cooperation, making the eventual arrests of Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic that much easier. Though

BELGRADE 00000773 003 OF 003

the arrest and extradition of Karadzic is arguably the single most important act of Tadic's administration, it is just the first of a number of bold moves he must make to improve Serbia's standing in world opinion. The government can no longer avoid confronting the public with the crimes of the Milosevic era. The biggest "frog" of all will be for Serbia's public to recognize that Serbs were victims, not of the international community or other ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia, but of their own leaders. End

Comment.

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